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ABSTRACT

The "Weekly Reader" National Reading and TV Survey polls the nation's children twice a year in the pages of various "Weekly Reader" periodicals that are distributed to students in grades 2 through 12. The survey: provides children with a means of expressing their opinions on significant subjects of concern to themselves and to adults; communicates the attitudes of children to the adult community through publication of the results (both in the public press and in scholarly journals); and provides a record, over time, of the changing attitudes of children toward subjects of importance. At all grade levels, the survey is filled out by students in class under a teacher's supervision. Teachers summarize the class results. Nearly 14,000 teachers, representing more than 340,000 students, responded to the 1987 survey. A sample of 4,700 teacher summary forms was randomly selected for processing, each representing roughly 25 students, for a total sample of 117,500 students. The survey included questions on: (1) attitudes toward reading books, magazines, and newspapers; (2) attitudes toward watching television and listening to the radio; (3) favorite kinds of books, magazines, television shows, and radio programs; (4) students' perception of the source from which both children and adults get most of their news; (5) feelings about the importance of both adults and children keeping up with the news and about the level of difficulty of news stories; and (6) the extent to which children believe what they read and hear. The results are reported using bar graphs and pie charts. (GL)

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The *Weekly Reader* National Survey on Reading and TV

Fall 1987

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Weekly Reader **retains full responsibility for the wording, analysis and interpretation of this survey.**

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THE *WEEKLY READER* NATIONAL SURVEY

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION **PAGE**

Background.....1
History.....2
Purposes of the Survey.....3
Field Publications.....4
General Methodology.....5
Cautions in Interpreting Results.....7
Distribution, Use of Results, Archiving.....8

THE SURVEY ON READING AND TV

Rationale.....10
Specific Methodology.....11
Results of the Survey.....12

THE *WEEKLY READER* NATIONAL SURVEY

Background

The *Weekly Reader* National Survey polls the nation's children twice a year in the pages of various *Weekly Reader* periodicals that are published by Field Publications and distributed to schoolchildren in grades 2 through 12. As many as 500,000 children may participate in a given survey, and generally about 100,000 responses are analyzed. The surveys cover children's attitudes about subjects of importance to them and to adults, such as the current survey on READING AND TV and earlier ones on DRUGS AND DRINKING and WILDLIFE. The results of **The *Weekly Reader* National Survey** have received wide publicity in the press and other media, are regularly reviewed in scholarly publications, and have served as the basis for changes in public policy affecting children and schools.

History

The *Weekly Reader* National Survey was begun in the spring of 1983 with a survey of children's attitudes on Drugs and Alcohol. The public response to that survey was so positive that *Weekly Reader* planned a series of national surveys. *Weekly Reader* now conducts two surveys every school year on a rotating cycle so that the same topic is surveyed every four years, providing longitudinal data over time.

PAST AND PROJECTED SURVEYS

Spring 1983	**Drugs and Alcohol**
Spring 1984	**Citizenship**
Fall 1984	**Student Election Poll** *
Spring 1985	**The Future**
Fall 1985	**Education**
Spring 1986	**Safety and Health**
Fall 1986	**Wildlife**
Spring 1987	**Drugs and Alcohol**
Fall 1987	**Reading and TV**

(repeat cycle)

*The *Weekly Reader* Student Election Poll is a recurring presidential "election" conducted among students by *Weekly Reader* periodicals that has correctly predicted the results of every presidential election since 1956.

Purposes of the Survey

The *Weekly Reader* National Survey has four main purposes:

To provide children with a means of expressing their opinions on significant subjects of concern to themselves and to adults;

To share information about the responses to the survey with the children themselves through the pages of the *Weekly Reader* periodicals;

To communicate the attitudes of children to the adult community through publication of results both in the public press and in scholarly journals;

To provide a record, over time, of the changing attitudes of children about subjects of importance.

Field Publications

The *Weekly Reader* National Survey is developed by the staff of the *Weekly Reader* periodicals, published by Field Publications in Middletown, Connecticut. Field Publications is a publisher and marketer of educational and entertainment material for children and adults. *Weekly Reader* periodicals reach a total of more than 10 million American children in preschool through high school. The company also runs a variety of book clubs for all ages and is the country's largest book club marketer.

General Methodology

Subject areas for **The *Weekly Reader* National Survey** were developed first by polling the editorial staff of the *Weekly Reader* periodicals and then by conducting research with teachers about the areas they thought would be most important to survey.

Questions for each survey are developed by the *Weekly Reader* periodicals staff after a review of literature in a specific field. When appropriate, consultations are held with specialists and organizations that have a particular interest and expertise in an area.

Questions are then pretested with sample groups of children at the appropriate age levels, refined, and tested again, if necessary.

The final printed form of the survey is delivered to students in grades 2 and up in the various editions of the *Weekly Reader* periodicals. For grades 2 and 3, a simplified version of the survey is provided, consisting of one page of questions. Because of readability issues, these questions are often not identical to those used in the upper grades, so results are not directly comparable; but they can be used to give a sense of trends across grade levels.

For grades 4-6, a two-page survey is provided in the pages of *Weekly Reader*. All questions are written in a form that can be comprehended by a fourth grader, and teachers are invited to explain the survey if anything is unclear. The survey is preceded by a paragraph that explains its purpose and the difference between a survey and a test. Responses to the questions in the grades 4-6 survey constitute the majority of the data used in reporting the results.

At all grade levels, the survey is filled out by students in class under a teacher's supervision. (Students do not put their names on the survey, but it might be possible for a teacher to read a particular student's answer, and this must be borne in mind when interpreting results.) After the surveys are filled in, teachers summarize the class results on a form provided in the Teacher's Guide accompanying the student periodicals. They then mail the results to the editorial offices of *Weekly Reader* anonymously on a postage-paid basis. (The teacher summarization takes about half an hour and this could affect results, as only teachers willing to go to that extra effort return surveys.)

When survey forms are received at the *Weekly Reader* editorial offices, they are sorted by grade. A random sample of about 700-1,000 teacher summary forms (representing 17,500 to 25,000 students) is drawn from each grade level in grades 2-6. Overall, forms representing as many as 500,000 students are usually received, and from these a total sample representing about 100,000 students is selected.

Data from the sampled teacher summary sheets are then entered into a computer, verified, and summarized by grade. Breakdowns by sex, type of area (urban, suburban, rural), and region of the country are also provided.

Cautions in Interpreting Results

The *Weekly Reader* National Survey is a readership survey, not a random one; that is, the respondents are all subscribers to a *Weekly Reader* periodical whose teachers have decided to conduct the survey in their classes, and hence they do not make up a random sample that can be statistically projected. However, the *Weekly Reader* periodicals are used in about 80 percent of the nation's school districts, and the survey sample of about 100,000 students is so large that it makes an excellent representative sample of the nation's children. In interpreting the year-to-year results of such a representative sample, a change of 5 percentage points or more could generally be considered meaningful.

Because the survey is conducted in class under a teacher's supervision and anonymity cannot be guaranteed, no questions are asked about individual beliefs or behavior regarding sensitive issues. Questions about what "kids your age" think are used instead. Hence some results pertain to childrens' own beliefs, and some to their beliefs about other kids—a distinction that should be kept clearly in mind when interpreting this report.

Distribution, Use of Results, and Archiving

The results of **The *Weekly Reader* National Survey** are distributed by *Weekly Reader* through press releases to the general media, through scholarly articles, and through reports such as this one. The press releases usually generate articles on the wire services, on network radio and TV, in national papers such as *USA Today*, in local media interested in the application of the results to local areas, and in a wide variety of special-interest publications. More scholarly presentations of the results appear in such publications as *Statistical Bulletin*, *Medical Times*, *Social Education*, and *Phi Delta Kappan*.

Because **The *Weekly Reader* National Survey** is one of the few sources of national data about American children's attitudes, it is widely used in discussions about policy affecting children. In the case of the 1983 DRUGS AND DRINKING survey, the *Federal Strategy on Drug Abuse Prevention* was changed as a direct result of the survey information.

Complete data are kept at the ***Weekly Reader*** editorial offices, **245 Long Hill Road, Middletown, CT 06457**, and at **The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, 421 Monteith Hall (Box U-164), Storrs, CT 06268**. The center is a nonprofit educational research archive in which are also stored the results of The Gallup Organization surveys, the CBS News and *The New York Times* surveys, as well as many other surveys. Copies of the Research Reports are also filed with the **Educational Resources Information Center's**

Resources in Education, published at the School of Education, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109.

THE SURVEY ON READING AND TV

RATIONALE

The editors of *Weekly Reader* selected Reading and TV as the subject of the survey conducted in the fall of 1987 because:

. . . television is a tremendous presence in the lives of most children across the country;

. . . low test scores, high drop-out rates, and high illiteracy rates indicate that today's children may not be reading as much as children in the past have read;

. . . the attitudes of children toward news and toward the news media may significantly affect their behavior as adult citizens.

Specific Methodology for the Reading and TV Survey

The 1987 *Weekly Reader* Reading and TV Survey was conducted during the week of November 6, 1987. Nearly 14,000 teachers, representing more than 340,000 students, responded to the survey. A sample of 4,700 teacher summary forms was randomly selected for processing. Each teacher form represents roughly 25 students, for a total sample of 117,500 students.

Participation by grade was as follows:

Grade	Estimated Student Responses	Total Teacher Responses	Teacher Forms Processed
2	112,500	4,500	1,000
3	126,275	5,051	1,000
4	46,250	1,850	1,000
5	38,875	1,555	1,000
6	18,750	750	700
Total	342,650	13,706	4,700

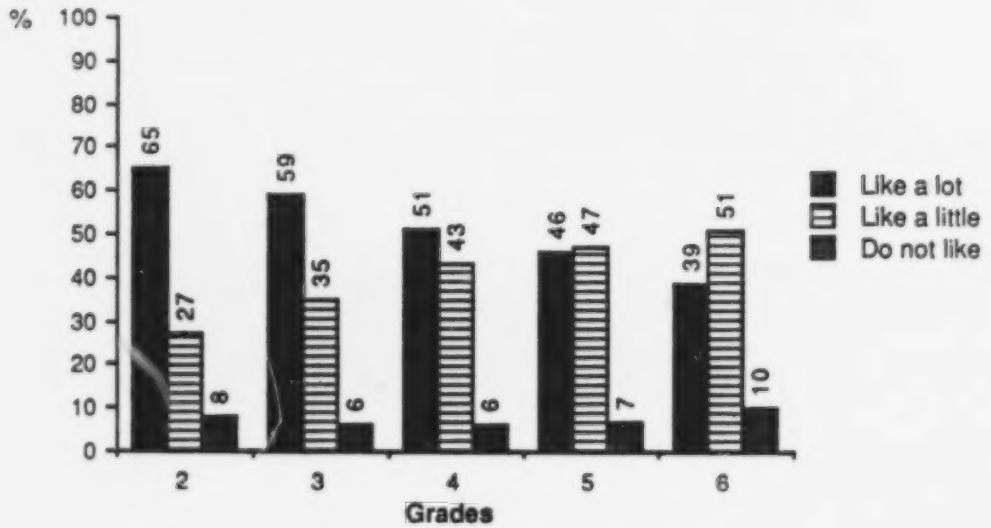
Results of the Survey

The following pages show the results of the *Weekly Reader* National Survey on Reading and TV.

Reading Books

How much do you like to read books? (Choose one.)

1. I like to do it a lot.
2. I like to do it a little.
3. I don't like to do it.



While many second graders say they like reading books a lot, that proportion decreases with increasing grade level. The proportion of children who like reading books a little increases with grade level; and the small proportion who do not like to read books remains roughtly constant.

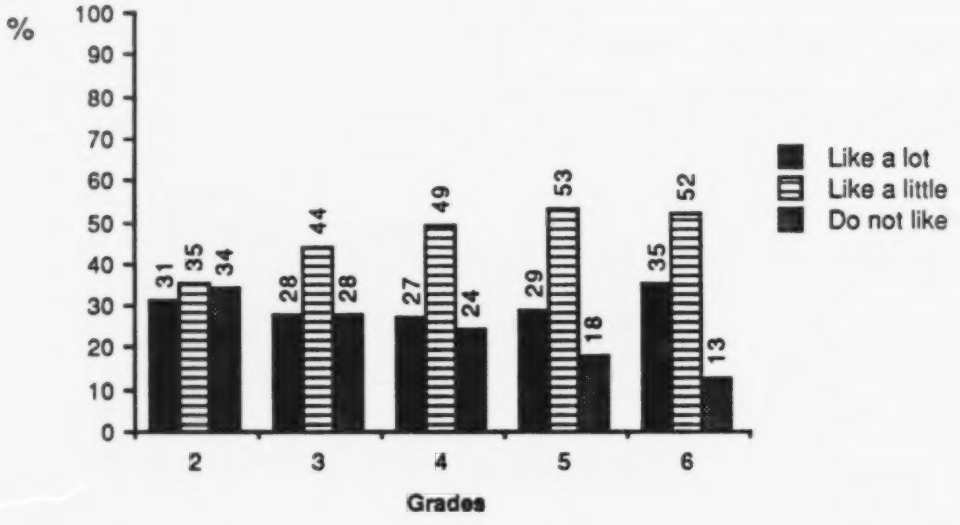
Reading books is one of the few areas in which girls' and boys' answers differed substantially: girls like to read much more than boys. For example, 71 percent of girls in grades 2 and 3 said they like to read a lot, compared to 54 percent of the boys. In grades 4 through 6, 56 percent of the girls said they like to read a lot, compared to 35 percent of the boys.

Note: For second and third graders, the question was worded, "How do you feel about reading books?" Answer choices were the same.

Reading Magazines

How much do you like to read magazines? (Choose one.)

1. I like to do it a lot.
2. I like to do it a little.
3. I don't like to do it.



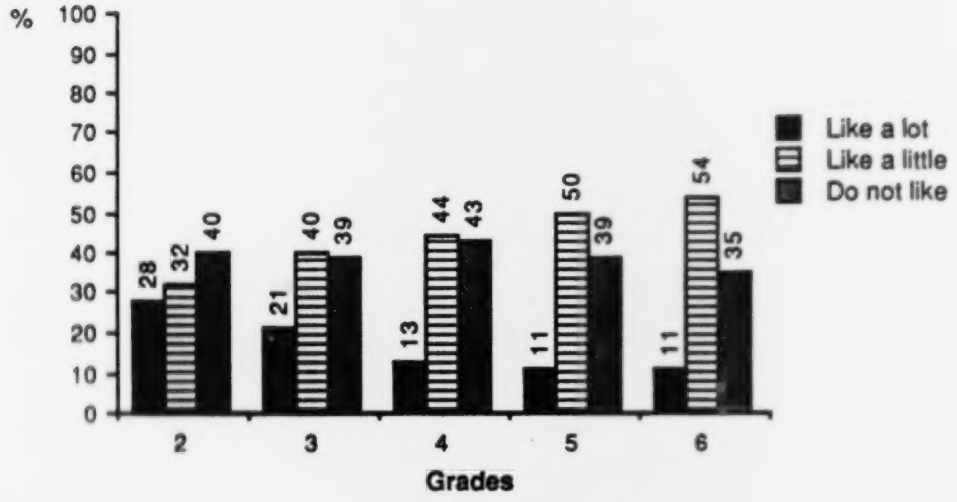
Compared with the number of children who like reading books a lot, far fewer -- 27 to 35 percent across grades 2-6 -- like reading magazines a lot. The proportion who do not like magazines at all declines with age, while the proportion who like them a little tends to increase.

Note: For second and third graders, the question was worded, "How do you feel about reading magazines?" Answer choices were the same.

Reading the Newspaper

How much do you like to read the newspaper? (Choose one.)

1. I like to do it a lot.
2. I like to do it a little.
3. I don't like to do it.



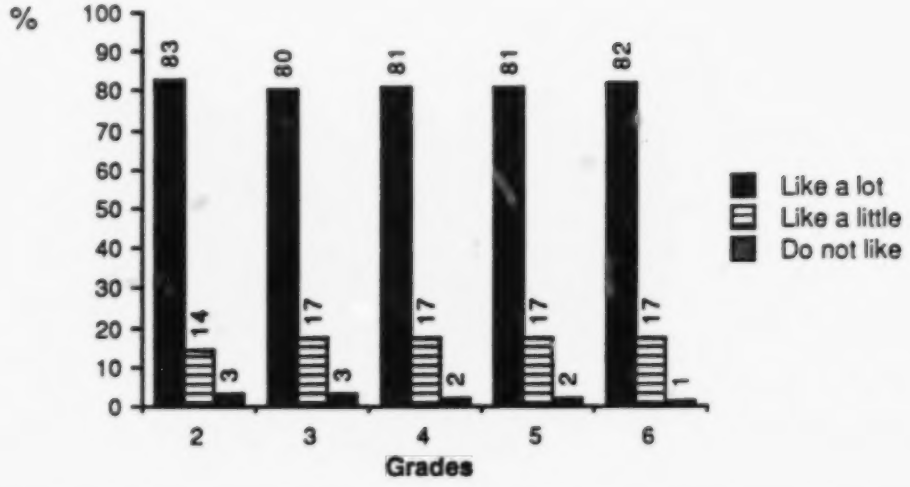
The newspaper is even less popular with children than magazines: across the grades, 35 to 43 percent do not like to read the newspaper. Further, the proportion who like it a lot declines with age.

Note: For second and third graders, the question was worded, "How do you feel about reading the newspaper?" Answer choices were the same.

Watching TV

How much do you like to watch TV? (Choose one.)

1. I like to do it a lot.
2. I like to do it a little.
3. I don't like to do it.



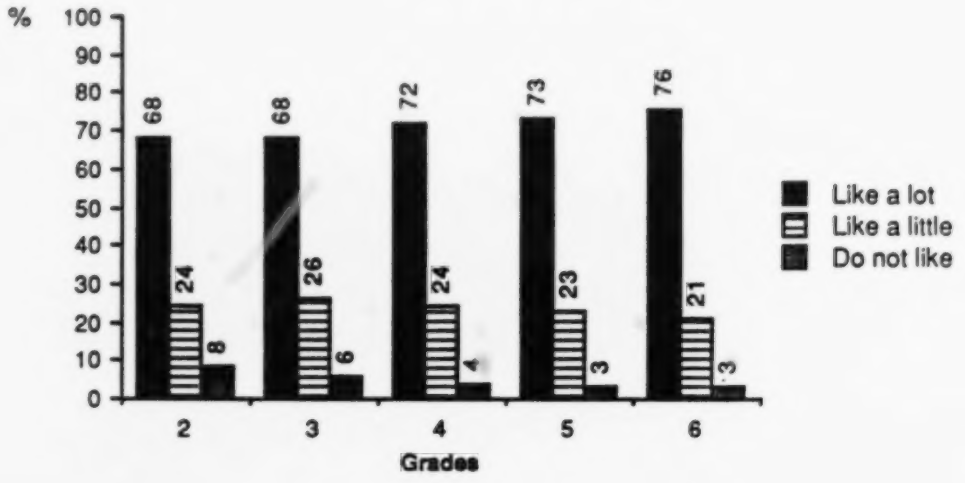
Television is much more popular than reading of any kind across all grade levels. The proportion of children who like it a lot remains constant -- and very high.

Note: For second and third graders, the question was worded, "How do you feel about watching TV?" Answer choices were the same.

Listening to the Radio

How much do you like to listen to the radio? (Choose one.)

1. I like to do it a lot.
2. I like to do it a little.
3. I don't like to do it.



Radio is less popular with children than television, but much more popular than reading. Among students in grades 4-6, girls showed a stronger interest in listening to the radio than boys; 78 percent of girls and 69 percent of boys responded that they liked it a lot.

Note: For second and third graders, the question was worded, "How do you feel about listening to the radio?" Answer choices were the same.

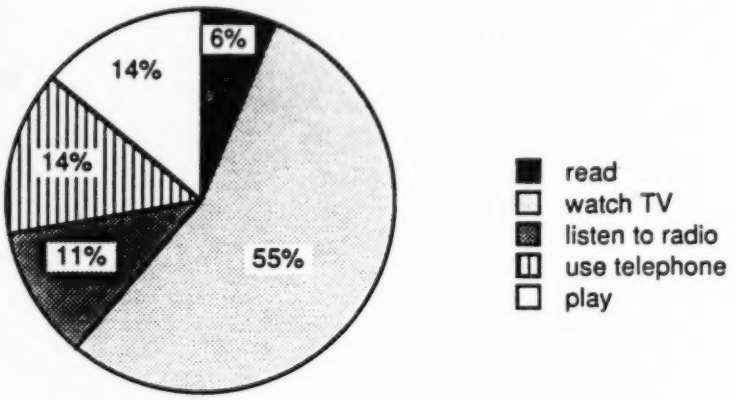
Activities at Home

When kids your age are home, which might they do most often? (Choose one.)

read **listen to the radio** **play**

watch TV **call someone on the telephone**

Grades 4-6



This question was asked of students in grades 4-6 only. "Watch TV" was by far the most popular response, "read" the least popular.

The survey also asked students in grades 4-6 for strength of agreement with this statement: "Kids would read more if they didn't have a TV at home." 52 percent said they agreed a lot, 28 percent agreed some, and 20 percent did not agree. In grades 2-3, 73 percent said they thought kids would read more if they did not have a TV at home.

Favorite Kinds of Books

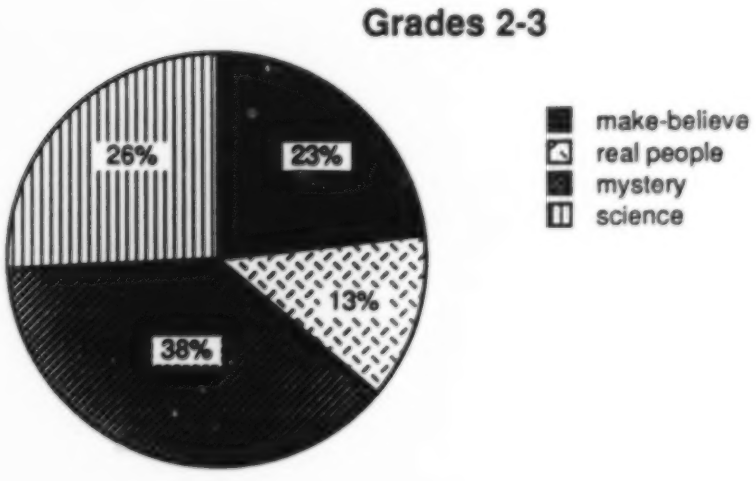
Which is your favorite kind of book?

one with a make-believe story

one with a story about real people

a mystery

a science or nature book



Among students in grades 2-3, both girls and boys chose a mystery as their favorite kind of book. But second choices differed. Girls' second choice was a book with a make-believe story, and boys' second choice was a science or nature book.

Which kinds of books do you like to read most?

make-believe stories

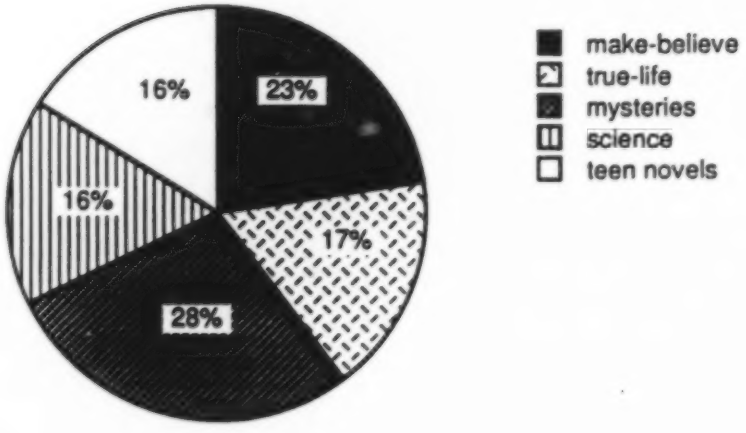
true-life adventures

mysteries

science/nature/wildlife

novels about teens

Grades 4-6

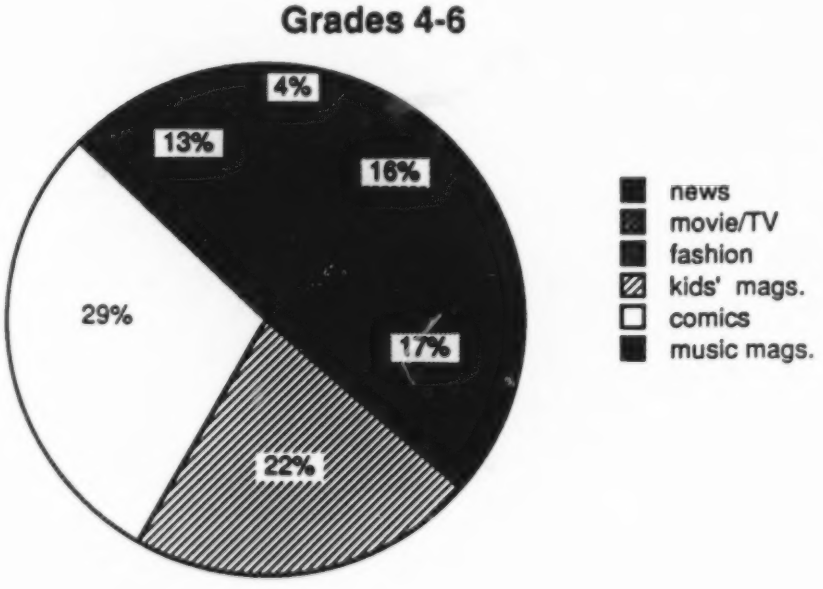


Again, mysteries were the first choice among boys and girls in grades 4-6. However, girls' second choice was novels about teens; boys' second choice was science/nature/wildlife books. Boys in grades 4-6 are more than three times as likely to choose science/nature/wildlife books as they are to choose novels about teens. Girls in grades 4-6 are less than half as likely to choose science/nature/wildlife books as they are to choose make-believe stories or novels about teens.

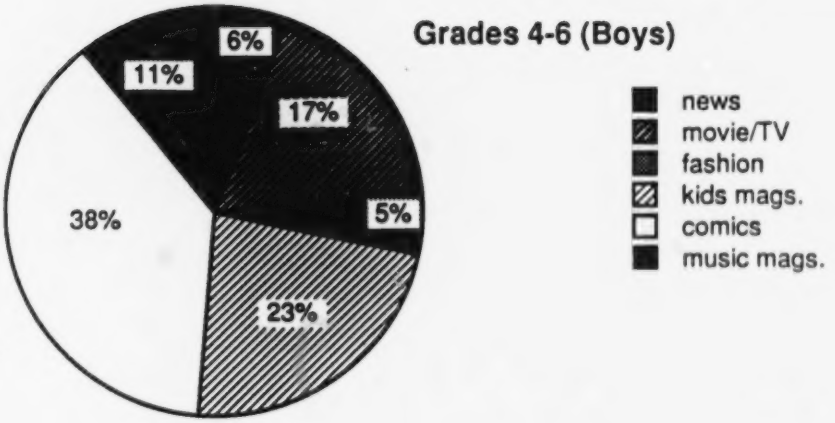
Favorite Kinds of Magazines

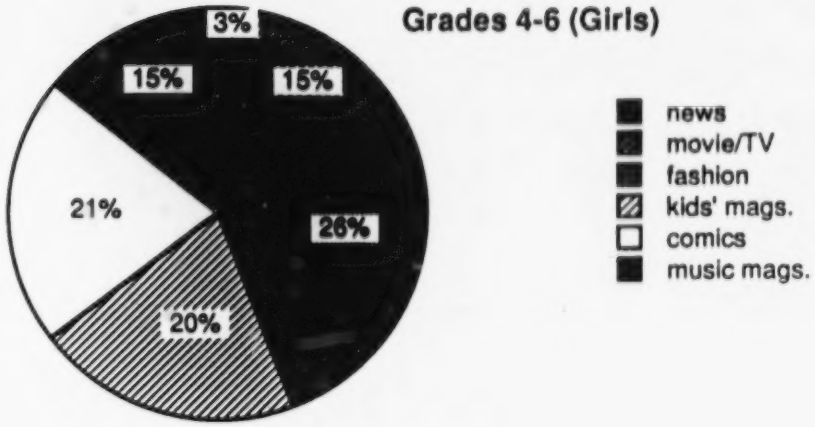
Which kinds of magazines do you like to read most?

news magazines
movie/TV magazines
fashion magazines
kids' magazines
comics
music magazines



This question was asked of students in grades 4-6 only. Comics are the favorite kind of magazine, followed by kids' magazines.





Boys and girls differed in their choice of favorite types of magazines. Although girls like comics, they prefer fashion magazines. Boys have little interest in fashion magazines.

Favorite Kinds of Television Shows

Which is your favorite kind of TV program?

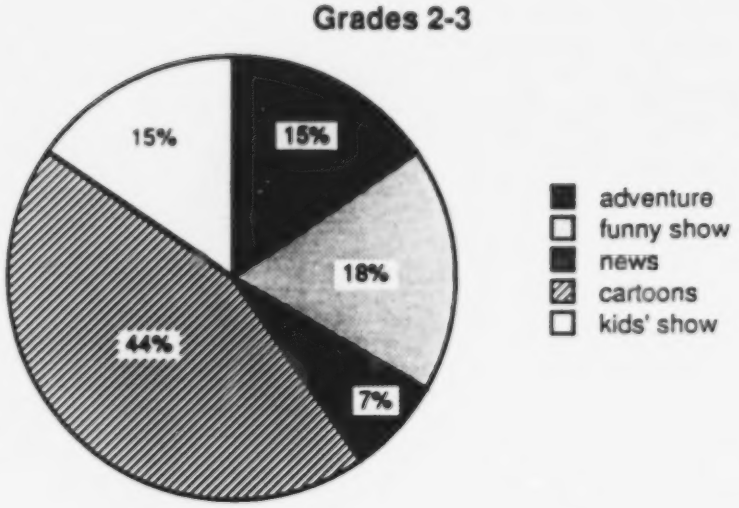
an adventure show

a funny show

news

cartoons

one that is for kids my age

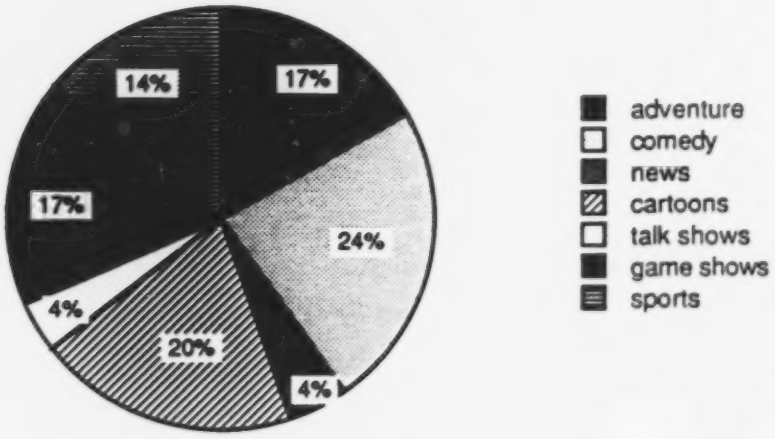


Among students in grades 2 and 3, cartoons were the overwhelming first choice for favorite kind of TV program. Second choices differed among boys and girls. Boys' second choice for favorite kind of TV program was an adventure show; girls' second choice was a funny show.

Which kinds of TV programs do you like to watch most?

adventure	**news**	**talk shows**	**sports**
comedy	**cartoons**	**game shows**	

Grades 4-6



Overall, students in grades 4-6 choose comedy shows, cartoons, game shows, and adventure shows as their favorite kinds of TV shows.

However, television preferences change as students get older. Fourth graders chose cartoons as their favorite kind of TV show; fifth and sixth graders chose comedy shows.

Boys and girls also have different preferences. While both boys and girls in grades 4-6 chose comedy as their favorite type of TV show, game shows were girls' second choice and sports were boys' second choice.

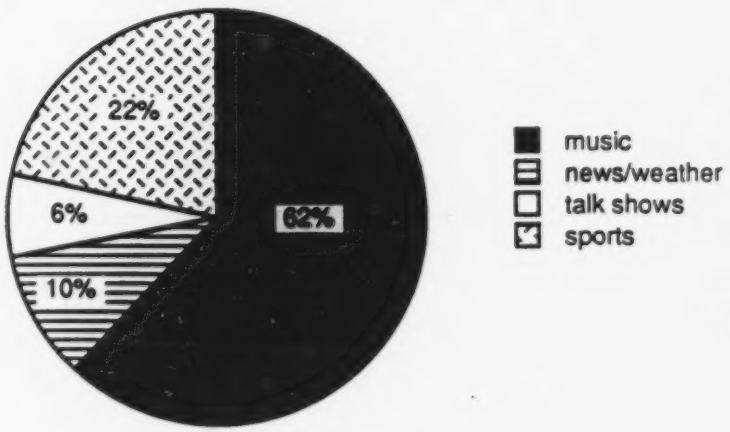
Favorite Kinds of Radio Programs

Which kinds of radio programs do you listen to most?

music **talk shows**

news/weather **sports**

Grades 4-6



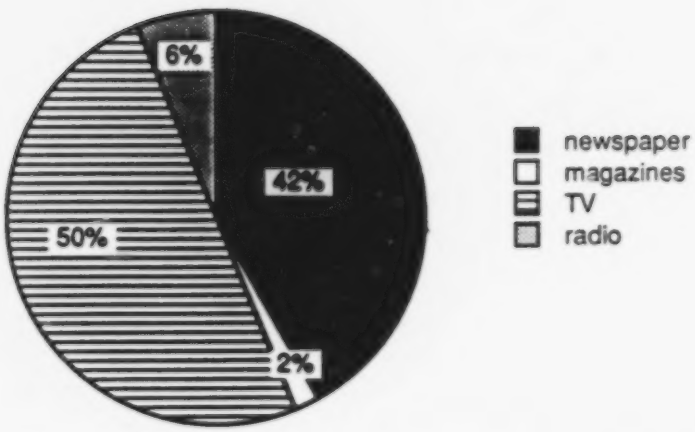
This question was asked of students in grades 4-6 only. Music is by far the most popular choice of radio programming, particularly among girls. Boys were much more likely than girls to choose sports as a favorite type of radio program.

Where Does News Come From?

Where do you think **adults** get most of their news?

newspaper **magazines** **TV** **radio**

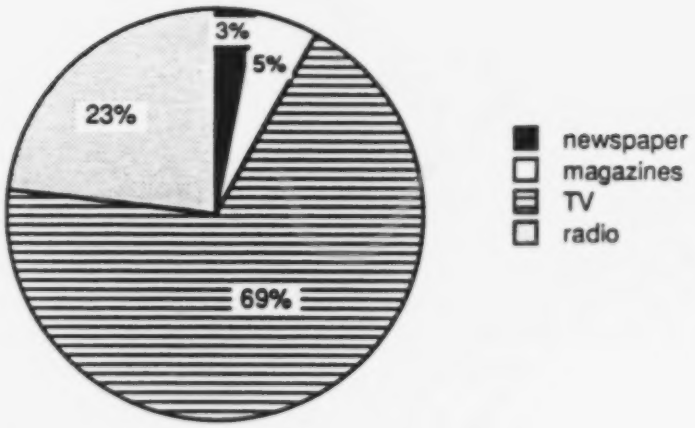
Grades 4-6



Where do you think **kids** get most of their news?

newspaper magazines TV radio

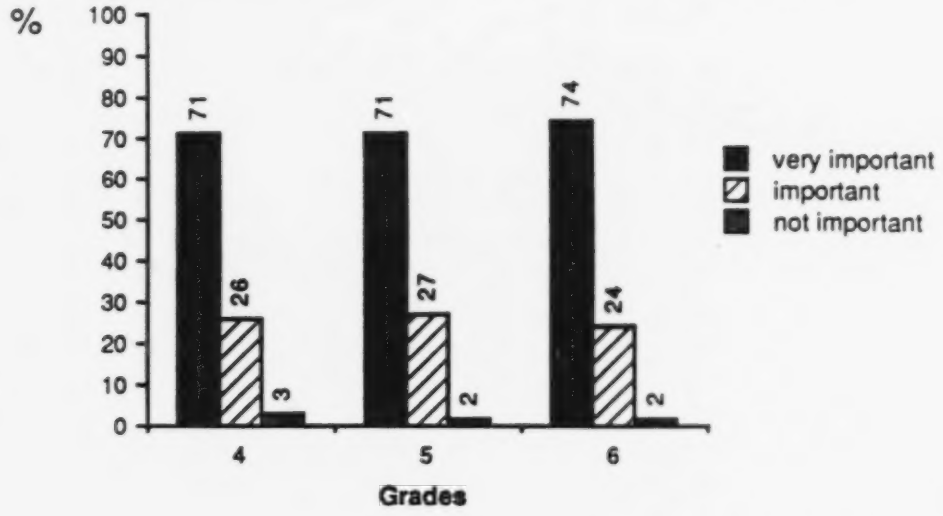
Grades 4-6



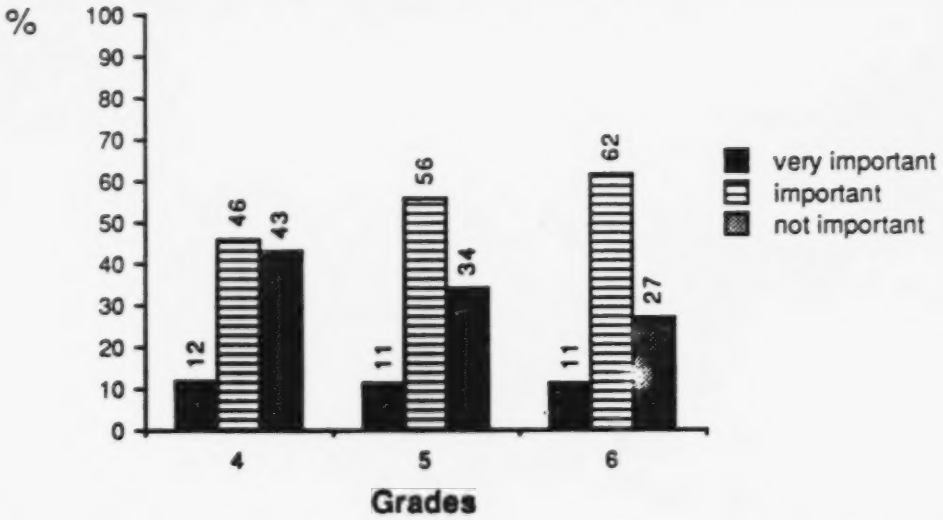
These questions were asked of students in grades 4-6 only. Students think that television is the most important source of news for both children and adults. However, whereas only a small number--3 percent--of students in grades 4-6 say kids get their news from newspapers, 42 percent think adults get their news from newspapers.

Keeping Up With the News

How important is it for adults to keep up with the news?



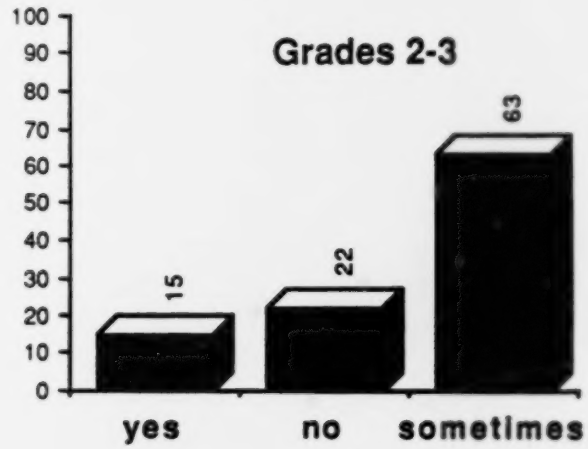
How important is it for **kids** to keep up with the news?



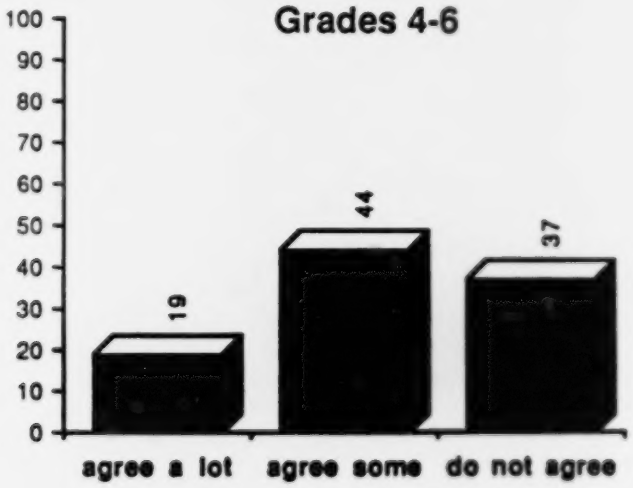
These questions were asked of students in grades 4-6 only. Students in these grades believe it is much more important for adults to keep up with the news than for kids to do so. However, the number of students who think it is not important for kids to keep up with the news does decrease as students get older.

Is News Hard to Understand?

Do you find the news hard to understand?



How much do you agree with: Most news is too hard for kids my age to understand?



The majority of students in grades 2-3 and grades 4-6 agree that the news is hard to understand at least some of the time. As students get older, they are less likely to say the news is always too hard to understand. However, even 6th

graders have trouble understanding the news: 58 percent agree to some degree that the news is hard to understand.

Do Kids Believe What they Read and Hear?

How much do you believe

a. the news on TV?

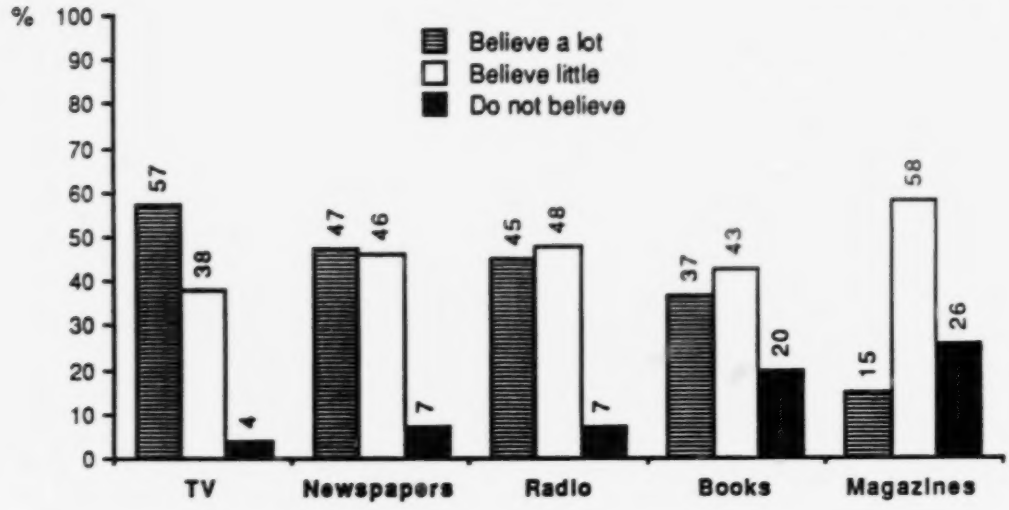
b. the news in newspapers?

c. the information in books?

d. the news on the radio?

e. the news in magazines?

Grades 4-6



These questions were asked of students in grades 4-6 only. These students are most inclined to believe the news on TV -- more so than the news in newspapers and on the radio, and a good deal more so than the information in books -- and least inclined to believe the news in magazines.